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SUBJECT: COALITION PROFILE: PM MALIKI'S STATE OF LAW
ALLIANCE

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[1](#)B. 09 BAGHDAD 1703
[1](#)C. 09 BAGHDAD 3246
[1](#)D. 08 BAGHDAD 969
[1](#)E. BAGHDAD 422
[1](#)F. BAGHDAD 415
[1](#)G. 09 BAGHDAD 2995
[1](#)H. 09 BAGHDAD 2671
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[1](#)M. RIYADH 221

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR YURI KIM FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Comment: In a significant move toward political independence, PM Maliki announced the formation of the State of Law Alliance (SLA) in October 2009, distancing himself from the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), the dominant Shi'a-led coalition. Despite its strong ties to Iran, SLA is perceived to be more independent from Tehran than its rival INA. Still, Maliki has had a hard time selling his credentials as a nationalist and his coalition has yet to gain significant Sunni and minority support or participation. The coalition may face an anti-incumbent backlash across the South for its failure to deliver improved services in SLA-dominated governorates. Another weakness is Maliki's failure to improve regional relations and help facilitate economic and political integration with the Arab neighbors. Despite significant political disparities, the PM's closest advisers tell us it is likely that the INA and SLA will join forces after the election to ensure a Shi'a-led government, and to avoid blame for allowing a "pro-Ba'athist" cross-sectarian coalition to come to power. Unless SLA wins a strong plurality, it appears unlikely that Maliki will be able to retain the premiership. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

COMPONENT PARTIES

[1](#)2. (C) PM Maliki announced the State of Law Alliance (SLA) on October 1, 2009 as a nationalist, non-sectarian political list but failed to attract significant Sunni or other minority participation (ref A). SLA comprises 34 parties, of which the most prominent are:

--Da'wa Islamiya (Da'wa - PM Maliki)
--Independents bloc (Minister of Oil Hussein al-Shahristani)
--Da'wa Tantheem (Tantheem - Hashim Nasr Mahmoud)
--Islamic Union of Turkomans of Iraq (Abbas al-Bayati)
--The National List (former INA chairman Hachim al-Hassani)
--National Emergence Movement (Khalid Sadi Yawar Awad al-Dulaimi)
--National Council for Iraqi Sheikhs (Abd al Hussein abd al

Atheem Nour)

--Assembly of Competent People for the Future of Iraq (GOI
spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh)

--Alliance of Iraqi Banners (Anbar Sheikh Ali Hatem Abd
al-Razzaq)

KEY FIGURES IN SLA

13. (C) Maliki's attempt to consolidate power during his premiership, particularly within the security services, has increased tensions with KRG President Masoud Barzani, most Sunni political leaders, and even his former partners now within the INA. This will hamper PM Maliki's chances of retaining the PM position, unless SLA wins a strong plurality of seats in the next parliament. Even within SLA, there is grumbling about Maliki's closed leadership style and disinclination to share either power or the spoils of power. (Note: PM profile will be reported septel. End Note.) Following are key figures in SLA, several of whom are considered possible PM candidates:

--Ali al-Adeeb: SLA candidate 1 in Karbala. Adeeb is Da'wa's bloc leader in parliament and acted as whip for the precursor pan-Shi'a United Iraqi Coalition (UIC). In August 2009, Maliki pushed Adeeb out of Da'wa's inner circle by denying him the position of deputy secretary-general at the party's annual conference. According to MP Qassem Daoud (INA/Solidarity), Adeeb has retained close ties to Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) leaders and other INA members since the UIC collapsed, and may be a non-threatening alternative to Maliki if SLA does well in elections. (Note: The Shi'a clergy reportedly objected to Adeeb as a PM

candidate 2005, citing his close ties to Iran. End Note.) Adeeb and Maliki have been extremely critical of Ayad Allawi and Minister of Interior Jawad al-Bolani's cross-sectarian coalitions, frequently conflating "secularism" with Ba'athist ideology or anti-Shi'a discrimination to POL M/C and other Embassy officials.

--Hussein Shahrastani: SLA candidate 3 in Baghdad. A nuclear scientist by training and Minister of Oil since May 2006, Shahrastani is head of the independents group within SLA. While he was consistently criticized within the Council of Representatives (COR) and the Iraqi press for failing to rein in corruption in his ministry and increase oil production, Shahrastani's frank testimony in parliamentary hearings in June and November 2009, and deft handling of the second oil bid round in December 2009 dampened the criticism, earned praise from political rivals like VP Adel Abd al-Mahdi (ISCI), and raised his profile within the coalition (refs B-C). UNAMI contacts believe that Shahrastani's influence within SLA stems from his close relationship with paramount Shi'a cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani: Shahrastani's nephew Jawad Shahrastani, is Sistani's son-in-law and representative in Qom, Iran. (Note: PM Maliki communicates with Sistani through his spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh, and Deputy COR Speaker Khalid Attiya. End Note.)

--Hassan Sunayd: SLA candidate 4 in Dhi Qar. A well-known poet and literary figure in Iraq, Sunayd has been in Da'wa's political bureau since the late 1980's. A member of the previous COR's Security and Defense Committee, he is Maliki's closest friend, one of his security advisors and liaison to the KRG leadership. Having survived physical torture during the Saddam regime, he has used his position as spokesman for the SLA to rail against the threat of resurgent Ba'athism and was critical of purported U.S. efforts to interfere in the de-Ba'athification process.

--Haider al-Abadi: SLA candidate 2 in Baghdad. Da'wa's official spokesperson and one of the few trained economists in the COR, Abadi served as head of the Economic Committee in the previous parliament. He strongly supports economic reform and anti-corruption efforts but admitted to emboffs on February 9 that his committee was not skilled or powerful

enough to intervene when the GOI promoted regressive economic legislation. Abadi is less powerful than Adeb within SLA but may attain an important ministerial position in the next government.

--Tariq Nejm Abdallah: Independent, but close to Da'wa. Abdallah has served as Maliki's Chief of Staff and cabinet enforcer since he became premier. He manages relations with Iran for the PM. Abdallah helped secure his home province of Nasiriyah and other southern, predominantly Shi'a provinces for Maliki's SLA candidates in the January 2009 provincial elections. Although Abdallah is not running for office, DPM Rowsch Shaways and leading NGO activist Mustafa Kadhimy (protect) told poloffs recently that Abdallah's name is being floated within the two Shi'a coalitions as a second-tier PM candidate.

--Ali Hatem al-Razzaq: Founder of the predominantly Sunni, Anbar-based Alliance of Iraqi Banners party, Hatem is the most significant Sunni actor Maliki has attracted to SLA. He is the de-facto head of the Dulaim, one of the most prominent tribal confederations in Iraq, and splits his time between Anbar and Amman, Jordan.

PLATFORM: LONG ON SECURITY, SHORT ON SPECIFICS
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14. (C) LAW AND ORDER VS. SERVICES: Maliki's list did well in the 2009 provincial elections by taking credit for increased stability after security operations in Basra and Diyala in 2008 quashed Jaish al-Mahdi and other militia activity (ref D). Abbas al-Bayati (SLA/Islamic Union of Turkomens) has told a number of Iraqi and Arab media outlets that the coalition's key priorities are providing housing to the disadvantaged and developing agriculture. However, Haider al-Abadi told emboffs February 9 that SLA candidates fear an anti-incumbent backlash in several Da'wa dominant provinces, due to a lack of improvement in essential services. Safia Suhail (SLA/Independent) complained to poloffs recently that SLA's overall campaign was overly focused on "personalities and security" rather than specific issues. Citing poor teacher training and school infrastructure, Izzat Shabander (MP and current candidate for SLA in Baghdad) told poloffs February 18 that educational reform and improvement was his priority issue and would be critical to Baghdad voters.

15. (C) SECULAR GOVERNMENT: Independents on SLA's list have told us they appreciate Maliki's nationalist perspective and relative distance from Iran in comparison to INA's leadership. Shabander said that the independents bloc (with the exception of Deputy COR Speaker and Shi'a cleric Khalid Attiya) was pushing for secularism in government. He observed that Maliki respects the idea of separation of Mosque and State, but noted that the PM has not vocally supported this view. (Comment: It is unlikely the PM will actively support secularism and risk further criticism that he is compromising Shi'a values and unity. End Comment.)

16. (C) DE-BA'ATHIFICATION: The parliamentary Accountability and Justice Commission's (AJC - ref E) effort to de-Ba'athify the national election candidate list was extremely popular in the Shi'a heartland. Both major Shi'a coalitions have campaigned on their "anti-Ba'athist" bona fides, which has effectively diverted attention from core issues like water resources and electricity (ref F). Maliki, Chalabi and ISCI's Jalal ad Din al-Saghir closely collaborated in 2005-6 on de-Ba'athification of thousands of Iraqis and found little resistance to their actions.

17. (U) CHANGE AS A THEME: Per PRT campaign reports, the most prevalent SLA campaign poster in Baghdad and in southern Iraq features PM Maliki smiling over a slogan calling for "Change and Building Iraq."

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES HEADING INTO ELECTIONS

¶8. (C) SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY: Maliki's popularity rose in Baghdad and in southern Iraq after 2008 security operations greatly reduced militia activity. He also benefited from the June 30, 2009 withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq's cities, by taking credit for "restoring sovereignty" and overseeing the rebuilding of Iraqi Security Forces.

¶9. (C) NATIONALISM: Maliki's close advisor and Da'wa MP Sami al-Askari remarked to POL M/C that this is the first time since the fall of Saddam that both the Shi'a and Kurds are competing on two lists, which he believed was a step in the right direction for Iraqi democracy. One of SLA's greatest strengths -- its effort to posit itself as a nationalist coalition willing to break from the pan-Shi'a list -- is also its greatest challenge heading into the election. Perceived as less sectarian and more independent from Iran than INA, Maliki and his partners hold greater appeal to more secular Shi'a voters. However, Abadi and PM Advisor Sadiq Rikabi confided to poloffs in November that SLA's leadership is worried about being blamed for creating a rift in the Shi'a community, which ISCI and others, including Iran, can exploit in the face of "Ba'athists building new coalitions." (ref G)

¶10. (C) Former Transitional National Assembly (TNA) Chairman Hachim al-Hassani and Anbari Sheikh Ali Hatem are the only nationally-prominent Sunnis in SLA. Despite early efforts to reach out to Sunnis and pitch himself as a nationalist, Maliki failed to secure the participation of two more prominent Sunni tribal leaders who had expressed early interest in joining SLA: Ahmed Rishawi (Abu Risha), head of the Anbar Awakening Movement, and Abdullah Yawar al-Shammari, head of the al-Shammari tribe and a political power in Ninewah. Yawar at one point told the Special Advisor for Northern Iraq that he could secure Ninewah for SLA if Maliki would agree to certain conditions (ref H). Both ultimately would agree to certain conditions (ref H). Both ultimately opted to join predominantly Sunni cross-sectarian coalitions: Rishawi went with Interior Minister Bolani's Coalition of Iraq's Unity (CIU), while Yawar brought his party into Ayad Allawi's Iraqiyya list.

¶11. (C) Maliki seemingly has failed to take into account the concerns of some of his few Sunni allies: SLA Baghdad candidate and Sunni tribal leader Sheikh Wasfi al-Asi told the Commanding General's political advisor that he was disappointed with the coalition's reluctance to accept the candidates he proposed around the country, and lamented that he received no support for his campaign.

¶12. (C) TARGETED ARRESTS: Maliki's ability to attract Sunni support was indisputably harmed by what Sunni leaders in the provinces of Diyala and Salah ad-Din viewed as the PM's direct intervention in provincial affairs to benefit Shi'a groups (Diyala) or favored Sunni politicians (Salah ad-Din) (ref L).

¶13. (C) REGIONAL RELATIONS: Maliki has not endeared himself with the neighbors. The PM's rush to accuse Syria of harboring the terrorists responsible for the August 19, 2009

Baghdad bombings (ref I) and subsequent high-profile attacks in Iraq marked a new low in Iraq's relations with its Arab neighbors. Some Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, have been critical of Maliki's "failure" to rein in Iraq's close relationship with Iran and have not hesitated to promote Sunni political groups within Iraq through media and financial support to balance interference from Tehran (refs J-K, M). SLA leaders, other than Minister of Oil Shahrastani, have not made the effort to engage neighboring Arab states in the way that Iraqiyya head Ayad Allawi and ISCI Chairman Ammar al-Hakim have. SLA figures maintain close ties to Iran but have managed to mitigate those ties more effectively in the public eye in comparison to INA.

PROJECTIONS

¶14. (C) Given the opposition of INA and KRG President Barzani

to a second term for Maliki, the SLA will have to win a convincing plurality (i.e., more than just a few more seats than INA) if he is to have a good chance of remaining PM. Based on current indicators, it is likely that SLA will win 18-22% of parliamentary seats, which would put it at 60-66 seats out of 325 in the next COR - or about roughly the same as currently projected for INA.

HILL